

[Nancy Remsen, Burlington Free Pres](#)

Gov. Peter Shumlin flew home Monday from Washington, D.C., with a promise that the Obama administration would support pending legislation critical to health care reform in Vermont.

"It is huge," Shumlin said of President Barack Obama's endorsement of a bill offered by Vermont's congressional to change a waiver date in the federal Affordable Care Act. The law now forbids any waivers from federal reform requirements until 2017, but Obama has agreed to support an earlier date -- 2014. That's the year when many provisions of federal health reform take effect.

"That is so critical to our efforts," Shumlin said in a telephone interview as he left the White House.

Shumlin has proposed moving Vermont to a single-payer health care system, with all Vermonters covered under by government-sponsored health insurance. The governor's bill is under review in the Vermont House Health Care Committee.

A federal waiver would allow Shumlin's proposed single-payer system to substitute for the health insurance exchange or marketplace that the state would have to create under the federal law. With a waiver for its alternative plan, the states wouldn't have to set up a system it intended to dismantle three years later.

Obama announced his support for the change at a meeting of the National Governors Association that Shumlin attended.

"I think that's a reasonable proposal," Obama said in comments made available by the White House. "I support it. It will give you flexibility more quickly, while still guaranteeing the American people reform. If your state can create a plan that covers as many people as affordably and comprehensively as the Affordable Care Act does -- without increasing the deficit -- you can

implement that plan. And we'll work with you to do it." Sens. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., introduced the date change measure in both the Senate and House a month ago.

Sanders wrote the waiver provision in the federal law, only to see it weakened with the insertion of the later effective date. "I am very pleased the president now agrees that we should make it available in 2014 as originally intended," Sanders said Monday in a statement.

Welch said he's been talking to his Republican colleagues about supporting the date change even though they would prefer to repeal the law. The U.S. House, dominated by Republicans, voted for repeal, but the bill has stalled in the Democrat-controlled Senate and would face a presidential veto even if it passed Congress.

Welch's message House Republicans has been, "If you are serious about state's rights, you will fast track this bill."

Shumlin said he has been making similar arguments to other governors, he said, noting that a 2014 waiver provision would allow them to fashion their own health care remedies.

"I'm optimistic," Shumlin said. "This announcement was well received by my Republican and Democratic colleagues."